First
Christmas

First Christmas (353 Days) by Brown Eyes Parker

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"Are you sure he'll like it?" El asks for the umpteenth time as she fidgets with the velvet bow in her hair.

Hopper sighs. "*You're* supposed to be setting the table! Mike's not *my* boyfriend!" he reminds her.

El slides off the couch and comes to take the plates from him. "I should have gotten him something else."

"He's going to love it, kiddo!" Hopper replies. "He probably would have been fine if you didn't get him anything for Christmas at all this year. Your presence is the only present he needs."

Puns are lost on El, so she frowns as she folds paper napkins into rectangles. *"My presence is the only present he needs?"* she repeats. "Are you going to wrap me and put me under the tree? Are we going to return his gift?"

"It's a play on words," Hopper starts to explain but is saved by knocking on the door. "I'll get it!"

"But it's probably Mike!"

"You need to finish setting the table!" Hopper answers.

El huffs and for a second, she wishes she were Samantha Stevens. She could just wiggle her nose and everything would be exactly the way it needs to be. Except five seconds later, Mike's there smiling at her with a gift in his hands and wearing the same outfit he did at the Snowball.

"Hi! What can I do to help?" He asks.

"Hi!" El replies, abandoning setting the table to hug him. "Everything's almost done! I just have to finish setting the table. Dinner should be ready soon, I hope you like mac & cheese! It was the easiest recipe I could find in the *Joy of Cooking*."

"That'll be fine," Mike assures her, stepping back and smiling, she's

wearing a new sweater in Christmas green and jeans. "You look really pretty!"

"You do too!" El says as she puts plates down. "I mean. . . you look really nice too!"

Mike blushes. "Thank you."

"Okay, I'm going to sit in El's room while you two eat and open your gifts from each other!" Hopper says. "But I'm keeping the door open, so you better behave yourselves!"

Mike flushes an even deeper shade of red and nods. "Yes sir!"

"He likes you," El whispers as Hopper disappears. "Promise me that you won't tell him that I told you though! It's supposed to be a secret."

"I promise!" Mike agrees automatically.

El beams and runs to the oven when the timer dings. She pulls the casserole dish out of the oven with oven mitts and places it on a trivet so it can cool for a little bit before she serves it. She puts a Percy Faith record on and the first strains of "I'll Be Home For Christmas"fill the air.

She's self-conscious when she realizes Mike's eyes are following her around the small kitchen. "What is it Mike?" she asks.

"It's. . . it's nothing really. Except this time last year, I was lying on the basement floor and wishing you could be here for Christmas. I-I almost didn't expect for my wish to come true and now you're here. And. . . I'm just really happy. I think this is going to be my best Christmas ever."

"Me too!" El agrees even though she doesn't have any other Christmases to gauge it by.

This is the first one she is celebrating. But she's enjoying it so far, she already likes sugar cookies and white lights. She *loves* all the Christmas specials on TV, the music, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and the few movies she's seen. She especially liked *It's A*

Wonderful Life. Except every time she sees Mike now, she wants to lean over and whisper in his ear that she's going to love him until the day she dies like Mary does in the drugstore scene.

The thought makes her heart race a little except she can never quite find the courage to lean in *that* close or the words to say when she was faced with the opportunity. She shakes the thought away and busies herself by scooping generous portions of mac & cheese on plates.

"I can't wait for you to open your gift!" Mike tells her enthusiastically as they eat their dinner.

"Your presence is the only present I need," El answers, causing Mike to blush again.

"T-That's nice," he stutters. "But I still want to give you the thing I bought for you. It took me forever to pick it out. *And* it *is* your first Christmas. . . I want it to be really special."

El wants to tell him that she feels special every time he is around but she's tongue-tied again.

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Mike and El wash dishes and clean the kitchen before sitting down on the couch with their packages. They smile at each other shyly, imploring the other person to go first with their eyes. Until El pushes her poorly wrapped present towards him.

"Open mine," she says. She hadn't been able to go out and pick it by herself but she'd given Hopper very specific guidelines when she'd sent him out to shop. He'd come home with a first edition copy of *the Outsiders*, assuring her that it would be just the *right* thing for him and that he might even be able to relate to it.

"Have you read it?" she asks after he's removed the wrapping paper and flipped through the pages.

Mike shakes his head. "No! This is perfect!" he assures her. "I really like it! We can read it together after Christmas!"

"Okay," El agrees.

"Here, it's your turn!" Mike says, handing her the gift he had gotten for her, "I really hope you like it!"

El tugs away the paper and uncovers a square, velvet box. She opens the lid slowly and discovers a silver bracelet nestled in navy blue silk. There's enamel green Christmas tree, a snowball studded with fake diamonds and a snowflake dangling from two of the chains. "It's beautiful!" she says sincerely as she picks it up.

"Here, give it to me and I'll help you put it on!" Mike tells her, she hands it over to him and he unhooks it so he can put it around her wrist. "It's a little big but you'll grow into it!" he says confidently.

"What is it?" El asks, admiring how the cubic zirconia glitters in the multi-colored Christmas lights as she turns it around her wrist.

"It's a charm bracelet," Mike explains. "I got a snowball because of the dance and a snowflake because of our first snow day together and there's a tree because it's your first Christmas. I'll add to it as we start to do more things together."

(True to his word, he does. He finds a nutcracker when he takes her to see the ballet a year later. When she starts school with them, he searches high and low for a backpack charm and when she turns 16 and they become an official couple, he adds an *E* and an *M* to her collection.)

"I love it!" She leans over to give him a hug, feeling like a teenage girl in all the sitcoms she watched. "Thank you so much!"

Mike hugs her back. "You're welcome," he answers, blushing again for the third time that night.

Hopper peeks his head out of El's bedroom door. "What's going on out here?"

"Look what Mike gave me!" El exclaims, eager to show off her new piece of jewelry.

"Um. . ." Hopper trails off, he's not sure how to react to it because he's

never had a teenage daughter and he doesn't want to be too upset about it. Not when Mike looks so pleased with himself and El looks so happy. "It's really nice! Did you pick it out yourself, Mike?"

"Nancy helped me find where to get it," Mike admits. "But it was my idea."

"Good job," Hopper congratulates, hating that this unassuming, sweet boy has so much game already and that El is crazy about him and vice-versa. "One more hour guys and then Mike has to go home! I've made too many exceptions already the last couple of weeks!"

Much to their credit, neither of them argues. Probably because they're afraid that he'll say no the next time they ask to spend time together.

An hour later, he comes back out and ushers Mike to the door. The two of them make a very big deal of saying goodbye to each other since its December 23rd and they both have been told they won't be able to see each other until the 29th (if not later). Hopper turns his back and hears mumbling than a gentle smack.

"Merry Christmas, El!" Mike says as he releases her from a hug. "I'll talk to you later."

"Merry Christmas, Mike!" El replies, sighing.

"Next year," Hopper promises both of them as he and Mike go out into the cold winter night. "You can spend Christmas together. Okay?"

They both nod reluctantly and nobody, not even Hopper can wait for next Christmas to come around.

The End

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Author's Note:

Yeah, I have no clue what this is but I hope you enjoyed it, whatever this is. I know the ending was a little anticlimactic but

I've been kind of busy lately with a lot on my mind. Tell me what you thought and I hope you guys have a very, VERY Merry Christmas.

By this time next week, I should be an aunt!

Lots Of Love,

Holly, 12/21/2017